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COALITION
FOR A SAFE
AND RESPONSIBLE
MICHIGAN

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Anonymous Alcohol Sales to Minors are Major Concern to Michigan Residents, New Survey Confirms

Wide Range of Safety-Conscious Groups
Form New Coalition For A Safe And Responsible Michigan

LANSING (March 24, 2004) – Eighty-nine percent of Michigan residents agree that underage drinking is a serious concern if beer, wine and liquor could be purchased through the Internet or mail, according to the **Coalition for a Safe and Responsible Michigan (CSRM)**, an new organization of safety, school and industry groups, which announced the results today at a kickoff event.

“Michigan residents clearly are against unmarked brown boxes of alcohol entering our state and believe ‘point, click, drink’ should not be an option when it comes to protecting Michigan youth,” said Betty Mercer, director of the Coalition for a Safe and Responsible Michigan. “The public is on record agreeing that it defies common sense to keep Michigan regulators in the dark about who is buying beer, wine and liquor in the local community.”

The Coalition for a Safe and Responsible Michigan, a new statewide grassroots organization of safety-conscious groups and agencies, was formally announced today in response to the overwhelming objection by Michigan residents to unregulated alcohol sales and increased access to alcohol for minors. Coalition members include Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP), Michigan Interfaith Council on Alcohol Problems (MICAP), Student Leadership Services (SLS), Prevention Network, Central Michigan University, the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County, the Traffic Safety Association of Michigan (TSA), the Traffic Safety Association of Macomb County, Jackson Traffic Safety Program, the Michigan Licensed Beverage Association (MLBA), the Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association (MBWWA) and the Associated Food Dealers (AFD).

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Key Survey Findings

The EPIC-MRA survey of 600 Michigan residents also reveals:

- 80 percent oppose the sale of beer, wine and liquor through the Internet or mail – with 68 percent “strongly opposing” these sales.
- Nearly 60 percent are concerned about no state oversight to track, monitor and regulate alcohol sales through the Internet and mail.
- More than 50 percent said that Internet and mail alcohol sales prevent the state from ensuring product purity and protecting consumers from product tampering.
- 68 percent said they are satisfied with the current selection of beer, wine and liquor in their communities.
- 59 percent didn’t know alcohol was available for purchase on the Internet or through mail – and 24 percent more actually didn’t think it was possible.

“Michigan’s current system of safeguards requires a face-to-face I.D. check – but that system is now at risk,” said Nida Samona, Chairperson of the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and a speaker at today’s event. “Most online liquor Web sites don’t confirm your birth date – all they confirm is your credit card number.”

Minors at Risk of Increased Alcohol Access

Most alarming in this case is the threat of increased access for minors. A recent report by the National Academy of Sciences shows that already 10 percent of minors obtain alcohol through the Internet or home delivery. This number can only grow with increased use of Internet alcohol sites.

“We should all be concerned when it comes to controlling how beer, wine and liquor are sold in our communities, said Homer Smith, executive director of MADD Michigan and a CSRM member. “Online, mail and phone sales of alcohol rely on voluntary reporting to ensure purchasers are of legal age. Trusting minors and anonymous alcohol sellers to such an honor system is not only naïve, it is dangerous. Mixing youth, the Internet and alcohol creates a deadly recipe for disaster, and our communities deserve better.”

Jim Ballard, executive director of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and a CSRM member, visited an alcohol Web site to witness firsthand how easy it would be to order liquor online. “I was distressed at how simple and quick it was to order a bottle of booze online,” said Ballard. “Internet and mail sales of alcohol create a virtual bar for teens, but there is no bouncer at the door to check for I.D.”

In 1999, the office of the Michigan Attorney General (now Governor) Jennifer Granholm conducted a series of stings where minors purchased alcohol online. According to their research:

- One in three Web sites agreed to sell alcohol to the minor purchaser with no more age verification than a ‘click’ of the mouse – the consumer only had to click a button saying “Yes, I am 21 years of age or older.”
- Virtually none of the sellers were concerned about Michigan laws precluding such shipments.
- In most cases, packages were left without requiring ID verification or a signature, and the packages arrived in plain brown boxes concealing their content.

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Michigan Case Sets National Precedent

Michigan's alcohol regulation laws are at risk of being dismantled due to a recent decision by the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals that would revoke Michigan's longstanding system of alcohol distribution, allowing unregulated sales of alcohol to come into the state unseen by local regulators, including through Internet and phone sales.

Michigan's Attorney General's office has filed a petition with the U.S. Supreme Court to review the lower court decision and reaffirm the state's right to regulate the sale and distribution of alcohol as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and federal law. Earlier this month, 36 state attorneys general filed to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of Michigan's petition on this issue of national significance.

"Michigan citizens want safe and accountable alcohol sales in their communities, and they rely on their state and local government to monitor product quality and to assure that vendors are following the law," said Mercer. "If the wine industry succeeds in dismantling our longstanding system of regulation, we will be left powerless to police unscrupulous out-of-state alcohol sellers. It will be a classic case of the greater good being sacrificed for the desires of a small, but vocal minority."

Michigan is at the forefront of a national issue, as more states are under attack to undo long-standing regulatory and tracking systems for alcohol sales. Michigan is the first state to take this case to the Supreme Court, but other states with recent or pending lawsuits on the issue include Florida, Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Washington. Most recently, the New York Court of Appeals upheld that state's rights to regulate alcohol distribution within its borders.

About the Coalition for a Safe and Responsible Michigan:

Coalition for a Safe and Responsible Michigan (CSRM) is a grassroots organization of safety-conscious groups and concerned families united to protect our communities through the promotion of safe and responsible alcohol sales in Michigan.

With the goal of protecting communities from irresponsible alcohol sales and use, CSRM challenges efforts to dismantle Michigan's longstanding system of alcohol regulation which requires alcohol importation, distribution and sale be made through licensed and accountable businesses in the state.

Please visit us at www.safeandresponsible.org.

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For a full copy of the survey results or to schedule an interview with a CSRM representative, please contact Caroline Jeffs at Strat@comm at 248.648.8000.

The Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association commissioned the poll on behalf of the Coalition for a Safe and Responsible Michigan.

EPIC-MRA, a leading opinion research firm, conducted the telephone survey of 600 Michigan active voters between February 22 and March 23, 2004. The poll has a sampling error of plus or minus four percentage points.

A copy of the full survey is available online at www.safeandresponsible.org.